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Address of Loyal Virginians
to their Friends in the
North.

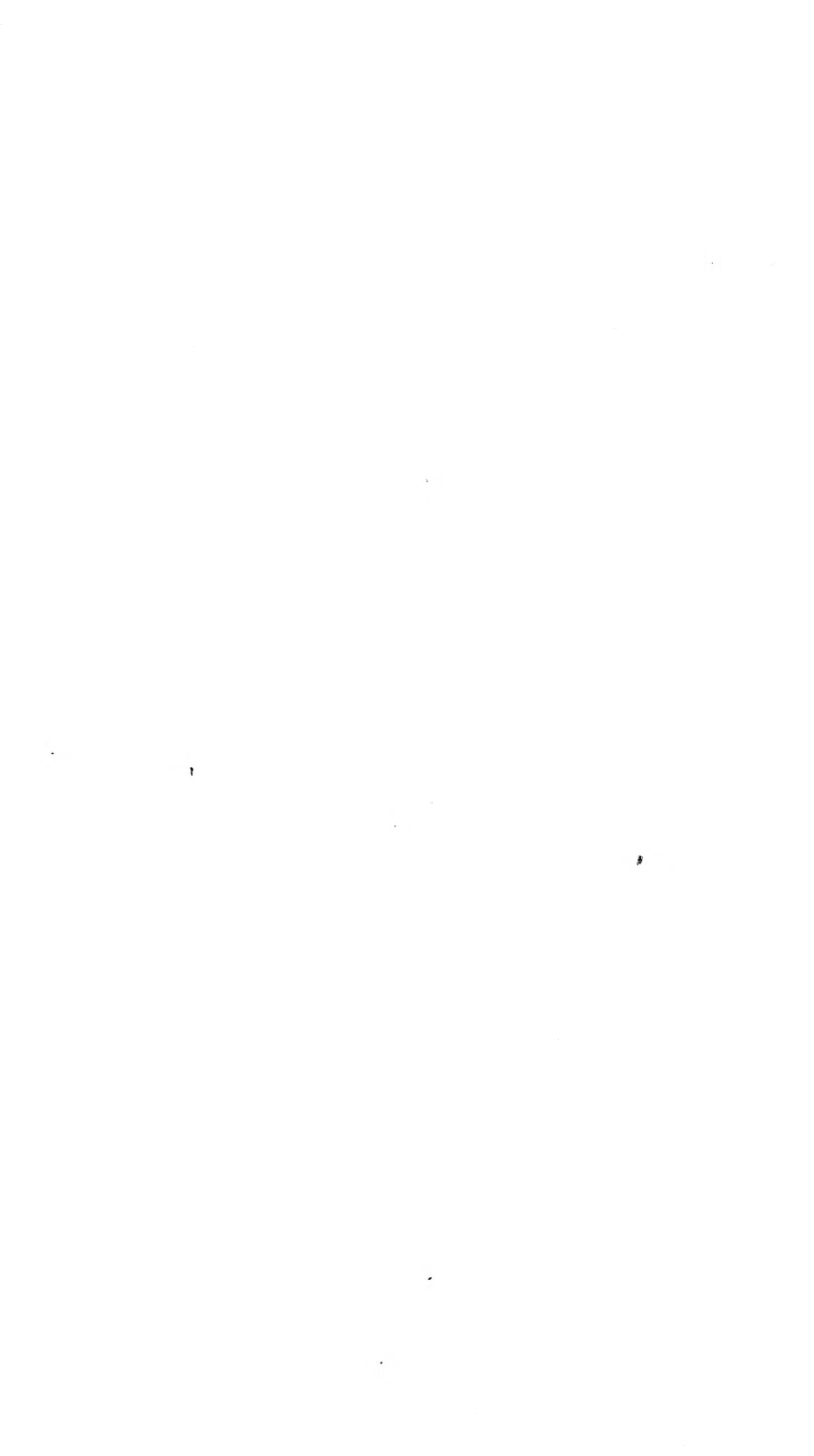


Class F 231

Book 1498

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ADDRESS

OF

Loyal Virginians to their Friends in the North.

SIR:—

The undersigned, Committee of Correspondence of the VIRGINIA UNION ASSOCIATION, take the liberty to address you this communication upon the subject of re-organization of the State Government in Virginia.

We desire to lay before you a brief history of the experiment that has already been made here—to explain to you its results at the present time, to point out the dangers which threaten us, and to suggest what appears, in our judgment, the only efficient protection against them.

The history of the restored Government of Virginia is briefly this:

Immediately after the ordinance of secession was declared adopted, a Convention was called to meet at Wheeling to undo that work. It met on the 11th of June, 1861, annulled the secession ordinance, and provided for the election of State officers to those places which it declared vacant by the treason of their incumbents. Hon. F. H. Pierpoint was elected Governor at that election, and the Legislature, subsequently, elected Senators to the United States Senate, where they took their seats. Gentlemen were also elected to the House of Representatives. Those chosen from the Western part of the State were admitted; but those from the Eastern part were rejected on the ground that only a minority of their constituents could vote at their election, the majority being prevented from voting by the rebel occupation of their districts.

In 1863 the State was divided, and a new State Government was instituted for West Virginia. By the erection of this new State, only a few counties remained subject to the control of Gov. Pierpont and the old Virginia restored State organization. These few counties dwindled down afterwards through the advance of the rebel military lines, and the assumption of exclusive power by Gen. Butler, at Norfolk, to one county, Alexandria, and a small part of another, Fairfax, in all containing about fifteen thousand white inhabitants, of whom a few thousand only were loyal.

Over this territory, the Restored Government claimed to exercise authority from the summer of 1864 to the spring of 1865, its executive office and archives having been removed to Alexandria at the separation from West Virginia in 1863.

In the opening of 1864, by call of the Legislature, in session at Alexandria, and then representing, or claiming to represent nine counties, a State Convention was convened for the purpose of amending the Constitution of the State. Delegates assembled from eight counties, representing a constituency, (if we may take the vote which elected them as a criterion,) of fifteen hundred votes in all.

This Convention proceeded to revise the Constitution, and having completed the revision, declared the Constitution adopted without submitting it to the people.

The Constitution thus adopted, was, by the act, to extend over the whole State as fast as it was recovered to the Union.

Upon the capture of Lee's army, in April, 1865, this Constitution, it is claimed by its friends, became the law of the land, from North Carolina to the Potomac. Ineffectual attempts had at several times been made to introduce gentlemen into the House of Representatives from several Districts in this State, but in each instance they had been denied admission, on the grounds before stated.

In the winter of 1864-5, the Legislature elected Messrs. Segar and Underwood to the U. S. Senate, in place of Bowden, deceased, and Carlisle, whose term had expired. These gentlemen applied for admission, but Congress adjourned without taking action upon their case.



About the 1st of May, 1865, President Johnson issued his proclamation recognizing Gov. Pierpoint as Governor of the State, and directing him to reorganize its civil government. The Wheeling Convention of June 11th, 1865, had declared the old Constitution and Code of Virginia still in force. The Alexandria Convention of February 13th, 1864, had abolished slavery, and had changed the qualification of voters so as to require them to take an oath to support the "Constitution of the United States, and the Restored Government of Virginia," *and to swear* that they had not "since the 1st day of January, 1864, voluntarily given aid and assistance in any way, to those in rebellion against the Government of the United States, for the purpose of promoting the same." It provided that the *Legislature* might *abolish* these restrictions, and that the person violating the oath should be subject to the penalties of perjury. It also provided that no person should hold office who had not taken such oath, or who had "held office under the so-called Confederate Government, or under any rebellious State Government, or who had been a member of the so-called Confederate Congress, or a member of any State Legislature in rebellion against the authority of the United States," excepting therefrom county officers. It did not make any provision that the legislature might abolish these restrictions upon holding office.

Such was the condition of affairs upon the recognition of Gov. Pierpoint by the President, in May, 1865. By the provisions of the Constitution and Code of Virginia, a general election for members of the House of Representatives and members of the Legislature, is holden on the fourth Thursday of May. One of Gov. Pierpoint's first official acts, after being recognized by the President, was, to advise the people not to vote for members of Congress at that time, for the reason, that he should order a special election for that purpose upon the full reorganization of the State. They accordingly did not vote for members of Congress, but proceeded to elect members of the Legislature from such counties as were organized on the day of election.

The disloyal element of our population, largely outnumbering the loyal element, and determined to rule the State, almost universally

subscribed to the oath required of voters by the Alexandria Constitution; and men, who up to that time had properly professed allegiance to the rebel State Government at Richmond, and to the so-called Confederate States, and who had contemptuously repudiated the Restored Government of Virginia, and the Government of the United States, came forward and took the oath just in time to run for office, and to vote. Such men, with one or two exceptions, were elected to the Legislature, and precisely such men, without any exception, would have been elected to Congress, had the Congressional elections been held.

The Legislature elect, promises to be an organization not at all less disloyal than the Legislature which sat at Richmond under the auspices of William Smith.

It is, of course, of no use to contest elections on the ground of disloyal voting, or the ineligibility of members elect, for disloyal men will not exclude members for disloyalty. We find ourselves bound hand and foot, and in the power of a disloyal Legislature.

The unconditionally loyal men of Virginia, have, for some time, anticipated that these results might follow. They, however, relied with considerable confidence upon Gov. Pierpont to see that his re-organized Government did not immediately slip out of his hands into the hands of rebels. You have, perhaps, shared our surprise and disappointment in reading his recent speech to a delegation from the southern part of the State in which he designated the provisions of the Alexandria Constitution referred to above, as the "*fury of war legislation*," pledging his immediate efforts to have those provisions repealed, and declaring his intention to place the power of the State as soon as possible, in the hands of those who formerly controlled it. This is being done as rapidly as it can well be effected. Already the Legislature has been called together in secret session, the object of the call being, as appears by convincing proof, to abrogate the existing Constitutional restrictions upon the elective franchise, and, in the language of the Governor, "to make it more liberal, even, than the delegation of the several counties request.

It has, in a session of only nine days, yielded all that the disloyal asked, abolishing all distinction, so far as lay in its power, between

loyalty and disloyalty. There remains now no protection to those who have stood by the Union, except what those who but recently have been in open rebellion choose to award. The usual relations of the successful and unsuccessful parties in war is here reversed. The Union men of Virginia are in the position of a conquered people. By the closing up of the war, their lives, their property, and their political rights, are placed in the control of those who in the war were their public enemies.

If it be the purpose of the Government of the United States to re-establish in Virginia the State organization which has been in power at Richmond during the last four years, that purpose is being completely accomplished by the present current of events. Already that organization is established in nearly all departments and in all respects, excepting only the persons of the governor and of the few executive officers who were appointed before his removal from Alexandria to Richmond. Appointments, high and low, to positions in every part of the State and in every interest of the State, are merely reappointments of those who filled the positions under Letcher and Smith. With the elective franchise extended, as is said to be recommended by the Governor, to all, or the mass of those who voted under Letcher and Smith, we shall have fully returned, by a very short circuit, to exactly the point where we should have been, had the rebel Governor and the rebel State organization been promptly acknowledged on the day of the fall of Richmond.

To prevent such a result, the only remedy appears to us to be an appeal to Congress and the Administration.

We address this communication to you that you may fully understand our situation, and may use your influence in moulding public sentiment in the North and in Congress, to the end that just and salutary measures may be adopted for the protection of the loyal people of Virginia, and, as we conceive, of the whole country, in the establishment of a State Government for this State.

We have organized an association whose branches are designed to extend over the State as fast and as far as they can be organized, and whose design is to unite and harmonize the Union element upon such a course of action as will prevent the consequences set forth above.

That course of action we are unanimously agreed upon, viz.:—to secure the elective franchise to our colored population, as soon as it can be safely done, and, meanwhile, to establish a strong and loyal Government, either military or territorial. Our reasons for this are, many of them, such as will be readily suggested to the minds of all reflecting persons who have given attention to this subject and to the present condition of things.

Besides being just and right in itself and required by the principles of our Republican Government, disloyalty without it will assuredly triumph; our State Government will be wholly conducted and controlled by those who have been actively and prominently engaged in sustaining the rebellion, and our representatives in Congress will be just those who would have been returned to the rebel Congress had that body continued to exist. The obligations of the State, issued to sustain the rebellion and held by the people of the State, amounting, it is said, to several millions of dollars, will undoubtedly be assumed, and thus the loyal people of the State, who have been on the side of the Government in its late struggle, will be taxed once to pay the cost of putting down the rebellion and again more heavily to pay the cost of sustaining it.

What may be the probable effect on our national obligations and the payment of the national debt, as well as the effect upon the general legislation of the country, by the admission to Congress of such representatives as we are sure to have if the present state of things is to continue, it is unnecessary for us to suggest, but it is pertinent in this connection to call attention to the increased representation which the emancipation of the slaves will give, not only to this, but to all the insurrectionary States, and to the increased power which they will thereby wield, either for or against the Government.

In view of all the foregoing, we respectfully ask that Congress regard the administration of Gov. Pierpoint as only provisional—that it inaugurate measures to call a State Convention at a fit time, for the amendment of the old or the formation of a new Constitution, the Convention to be chosen by the loyal people of the State without

distinction of color, and from which all who have voluntarily aided the rebellion be excluded, whether as members or electors,—that until such fit time arrive, it organize a provisional or territorial government upon such plan, as in its judgment, shall seem best calculated to guarantee the enjoyment of the civil rights and the peaceable pursuit of the ordinary avocations of the people, and to emancipate the blacks from the control of their masters, and educate them for the enjoyment of their civil rights, to the end that when a State Government is finally established, it may be upon such a basis as will protect the rights of all, and afford additional guarantees for the perpetuation of that Union which a gigantic war of four years duration has been waged, to defend and secure.

S. FERGUSON BEACH,	}	CORRESPONDING COMMITTEE.
LYSANDER HILL,		
W. J. COWING,		

All letters of inquiry should be addressed to the above Committee, or to any single member of it.

ALEXAEDRIA, VA., JUNE 30, 1865.

Found among the papers of Hon. H. P. H. Brewster
formerly Congressman from Ills. (1866-70)







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